

Make Believe I'm Crazy,
—Then Freedom!

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Because of my "uncooperative attitude," the prison authorities made it "tough for me." So, rather than undergo any more of their roughing up, I decided to press for transfer to a prison

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GABRIELLE HAMMERSTEIN
Finally Gains Freedom

hospital.

From talking to other inmates, I had learned that it best to become a "mental case," which is not infrequent, on account of nutritive deficiencies, combined with the inhuman treatment in East German penal institutions. "But you've got to fake 'paranoia,' not 'schizophrenia,'" they had said. "Schizos get electric shock, and that's worse than you get here."

So I became quietly, happily "ga-ga." I started by simply lapsing into long periods of silence, smiling to myself all the time. Then, one night, I took the garbage can in our cell and banged it against the door, shrieking with laughter, for two hours or so. The guards had orders not to enter the cells during the night. So they just stood outside, while my poor cellmates held their ears. Then I simply "let myself go." I re-

fused to eat, get up, keep up my bodily hygiene.

The prison nurse came and tested my "catatonic state" by sticking a long needle into my thigh. It took all my self control to keep from flinching or crying out. But eventually, I succeeded. After some more beatings from the guards, I was transferred to Waldheim, near Karl Marx City (formerly Chemnitz), close to the Czechoslovakian border.

PRISON HOSPITAL

Waldheim, a penitentiary with a separate prison hospital, was heaven compared with Halberstadt. We were still confined to cells, but the treatment was that accorded sick patients. The food was slightly better, even though—as throughout the East German economy—it suffered the same fluctuations as the harvests on the collective farms. I had started to develop hunger edema and began to swell up

grotesquely. This condition remained throughout the rest of my captivity.

Meanwhile, my lawyer told me the U. S. Government was doing "everything possible to effect my release." I was skeptical, but hope began to glimmer anew. Then, in April, 1963, I was told my mother had come to see me. She arrived in Waldheim, and we were even allowed to embrace briefly. She whispered to me that, indeed, there was a chance for freedom.

From her first visit on, I was even allowed to write letters. By this time, I had allowed myself

to be "cured" to a degree, so that the East German doctors still felt I was "haftunfaehig," unable to be confined in a penitentiary.

In September, my mother was allowed to visit me once more. From her hopeful attitude, I knew that things were looking up. Another few months went by without further news. Then, in February, I was notified by my lawyer that I "might be released within a few months."

On March 24, the great day came. I was taken to Hohen-schoenhausen near Berlin once more, where I had been "processed" for trial. But this time, I was lodged in a comfortable cell. My German and Russian interrogators, Major Turpylin and Lieutenant "Bubi" visited me. They tried—completely reversing their tactics—to get me to ask "for political asylum" in East Germany or Russia. They obviously didn't like the idea of my returning to the West with the wealth of information I had gathered, but I just laughed in their face.

The whole matter was back in the hands of the Soviets. I was handed to a U. S. Military Mission representative. An American car whisked me through the wall to West Berlin and on to Tempelhof airfield. My mother joined us, and we were flown to Frankfurt, where we boarded a U.S.-bound jet.

As our plane winged toward New York, I reflected on the

past 27 months. It had been worth the pain, anguish and fear. Even though I myself would never again set foot in the Communist world, the fact that I had deterred Red machinations even a little, while they were searching for my "paper agents," lent meaning to my ordeal.

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